

# **The Book of Revelation**

## **Week #11 – The Two Witnesses**

### **I. REVIEW OF WEEK #10**

#### ***A. Fifth Trumpet***

The fifth trumpet unlocks the abyss, releasing volcanic smoke and swarms of warrior locusts. These are demonic forces let loose by God to wreak havoc on those who refuse to recognize Him [cf. v. 4].

But restrictions are placed on the damage that these demonic forces can inflict.

1. Vegetation is to be left unharmed;
2. only the wicked are to be targeted for torment;
3. victims are not to be killed;
4. the plague is to end in five months.

These restrictions suggest that God is permitting punishment aimed at bringing about the repentance, rather than the total destruction of sinners.

All the punishments in the book of Revelation are designed to move people to repentance.

#### ***B. Sixth Trumpet***

The sixth trumpet releases four demons [fallen angels] which rouse an army of fire-breathing horses into battle.

The demonic locusts were allowed to injure but not kill; but now come hordes of demonic cavalry, an evil army of 200,000,000 to annihilate a third part of the human race.

The vast size of the army indicates the scale of evil in the world.

### ***C. The Wicked do not Repent***

Tragically, the survivors of the sixth trumpet remain hardened in their wickedness and refuse to repent.

## **II. THE ANGEL WITH THE LITTLE SCROLL**

### **Read: Revelation 10:1-4**

*[1] Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.*

*[2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land,*

*[3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring; when he called out, the seven thunders sounded.*

*[4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."*

### ***A. Interlude***

As with the sixth and seventh seals, an interlude separates the sixth [9:13-21] and seventh trumpet [11:15-19]. Now back on earth, John sees a new vision – a mighty angel with a little scroll in his hand.

### ***B. A Mighty Angel***

The mighty angel in this passage is described in terms that show that he comes straight from the presence of God and the Risen Christ. [Some commentators think he may be the glorified Christ].

He is so close to Christ that he radiates His glory and is therefore described in terms much like the Lord.

The angel is not named, but he might be Gabriel, because of the similarity of Rev 10:5-6 with Daniel 12:5-7.

### ***C. The Little Scroll***

The angel has a little scroll in his hand. This scroll is open and is different from the sealed scroll in Revelation 5 that only the Lamb can open.

The fact that it is open indicates that its content is not secret.

It introduces the second cycle of visions in Revelation that seem more focused than the first cycle.

John is about to write down what he hears but is told not to do so. He is being given a revelation which at the moment he is not to pass on.

Apparently, John does not tell us everything he saw in the vision. The content will only be made known at the end of time.

#### ***D. The Angel Straddles Sea and Land***

The angel has his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. This shows his size and power for the sea and land stand for the whole universe.

In addition, the sea is a symbol for the nations, and the land represents the Promised Land, that is, Israel.

The angel's stance on the "sea" and the "land" shows his authority over the nations [the sea] and Israel [the land].

#### ***E. The Seven Thunders***

The angel's voice sounds like a roaring lion because he speaks the words of Christ, the Lion of Judah.

The seven thunders represent the mighty voice of the Lord. In Psalm 29 "the voice of the Lord" is referred to as thunder seven times.

Each peal of thunder carries a message of its own, and the fact that there are seven means that they carry everything that God wishes to reveal.

### **III. NO FURTHER DELAY**

#### **Read: Revelation 10:5-7**

*[5] And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay,*

*[7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.*

### **A. The Mystery of God**

The angel swears an oath that there will be no further delay in fulfilling the mystery of God, that is, the whole purpose of God's plan in human history will stand revealed, when the seventh trumpet is sounded.

So the seventh trumpet announces the fulfillment of the mystery of God and the imminent arrival of the kingdom of Christ.

In Revelation the end of time is signalled by the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

## **IV. JOHN EATS THE SCROLL**

### **Read: Revelation 10:8-11**

*8] Then the voice which I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."*

*[9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth."*

*[10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.*

*[11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."*

### **A. The Word of God is Bitter-Sweet**

John is told to take and eat the scroll, similar to the prophet Ezekiel, where the prophet consumes a scroll containing judgments against Israel. At first the scroll was sweet, but the prophecies of Israel's destruction made his task a bitter one.

The prophecy contains grace and blessing [sweet as honey], but also judgment and condemnation [bitter]. It promises hope, but turns bitter because it predicts suffering for both the world and the Church; for saint and sinner alike.

### **B. The Prophet Devours God's Word**

God's Word is not just something the prophet hears, it is something he devours;

*[16] Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O LORD, God of hosts [Jeremiah 15:16]*

God's words become part of the prophet's very being.

### **C. Renewal of John's Prophetic Ministry**

This passage is a renewal of John's prophetic mission to speak God's word. He is told to prophesy again regarding the coming destruction of Jerusalem. These prophecies are recorded in the visions of Chapters 11-22.

## **V. THE TEMPLE AND TWO WITNESSES – CHAP 11**

### **A. Overview**

The next section of Revelation is difficult to interpret. It has been called the most difficult and most important chapter in Revelation.

This passage is an insertion between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The prophecy connected with what is on the scroll [Rev 11:1-13] acts as a preamble to the events that follow the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

It has to do with the tribulation suffered by the Church. Two key elements are introduced in this section:

- the time limit set for the period of eschatological woes [Rev 11:2,3], and
- the beast which ascends from the abyss.

The Two Witnesses come forward to preach penance and are martyred to the great delight of their adversaries. The time of the preaching of the Two Witnesses will be 1260 days, or three and a half years.

### **Read: Revelation 11:1-2**

*[1] Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there,  
[2] but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.*

### **B. Measuring the Temple**

John is told to measure the temple. Is this temple the earthly temple or the heavenly temple? Scholars disagree. Rev 11:1-2 seems to imply that the Jerusalem Temple is still standing, an argument for dating the book before AD 70.

John probably has *both* the earthly and heavenly temples in mind.

The image of the measuring rod is taken from the prophet Ezekiel. John measures the sanctuary but excludes the outer court which has been given over for destruction by the Gentiles.

To *measure* biblically can have various meanings. It can mean to mark for the purpose of rebuilding or destroying; but here its meaning is rather to seal for protection as in Rev 7:4-8 [sealing of the people of God before opening the seventh seal].

It shows that God is going to preserve part of the Holy City from the destructive power of the Gentiles [Romans] and/or demonic forces.

The temple, the altar, and the worshippers represent the new people of God - the Church, which will be protected as it undergoes the great persecution.

The measuring of the Temple, then, is the sealing of the people of God; they are to be preserved in the terrible time of trial; but the rest are doomed to destruction.

This trial [the trampling by the Gentiles in Rev 11:2] will last a short time – forty-two months.

### **C. Trample over the Holy City**

Taken literally, this would refer to the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70, as in Luke 21:20-24.

*20] "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.*

*[21] Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it; For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people; . . .*

*[24] they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all*

*nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

Though tens of thousands of Jews perished in the calamity, the Christians of Jerusalem, heeding the prophecy of Jesus, fled to safety in the Transjordan town of Pella [Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3, 5]

#### **D. Forty-Two Months**

“Forty-two months” is equivalent to three and a half years or 1260 days. These numbers will appear over and over again in the following chapters.

The length of the terror or persecution foretold in verse 2 will last for forty-two months. During this time the Gentiles will trample the Holy City.

The image is taken from Daniel 7:25, where the fourth beast will persecute the righteous for “a time, two times, and half a time” [three and a half years – a “time” is equivalent to a year]. See also Daniel 12:7.

*[25] He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand **for a time, two times, and half a time.***

#### **E. Origin of the Forty-two Months**

The origin of the phrase “forty-two months” comes from that most terrible time in Jewish history, when Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, tried to force Greek language, culture, and worship on the Jews, and was met with violent and stubborn resistance led by Judas Maccabeus.

In John’s day Daniel 12:7 was understood as a prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes [175-164 BC] who persecuted the Jews for three and a half years.

By prophesying about a coming forty-two months John compares the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans to something the Jews had already experienced.

The Jewish war [Ad 66-70], culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple also lasted for about three and a half years.

## **VI. THE TWO WITNESSES**

Who are these two witnesses? Are they historical individuals? They are not identified in Revelation, and there has been much speculation and disagreement by scholars.

The witnesses testify to Christ and choose to die for Him rather than deny Him and his Gospel.

### **Read: Revelation 11:3-6**

*[3] And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*

*[4] These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth.*

*[5] And if any one would harm them, fire pours out from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed.*

*[6] They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

#### **A. Jewish Belief**

It was always part of Jewish belief that the Lord would send his special messenger to men before the final coming of the Day of the Lord [the end of time – the final judgment].

Through the prophet Malachi God says: "*Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me . . .* [Malachi 3:1].

Malachi actually identifies the messenger as Elijah: "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes* [Mal 4:5].

In Revelation 11:3 we have the coming of the two messengers before the final trial or persecution of the Church. They will prophesy during the persecution of 1260 days.

God protects them in a special way, yet He does not spare them death and suffering. In the end, however, they will be glorified in heaven.

### **B. Identity of the Witnesses**

Some see the witnesses as two unknown martyrs or as historical figures from the OT such as Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah.

Tradition identifies them as St. Peter and St. Paul who suffered martyrdom in Rome.

St. Jerome and many Fathers of the Church thought they were Enoch and Elijah [neither Enoch nor Elijah was said to die].

*Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him [Gen 5:24].*

*And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven [2 Kings 2:11].*

But the most commonly accepted explanation today is that they are Moses and Elijah. The actions of the witnesses most closely recall those of Moses and Elijah who represent the Law and the Prophets and were present with Jesus at His transfiguration.

The problem with identifying one of the witnesses with Moses is that according to Deuteronomy 34: 5-6 Moses died and was buried:

*So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day.*

However, the NT book of Jude makes reference to an extra-biblical account of Moses' assumption into heaven [cf Jude 9].

Also, in Rev 11:7-12, the Beast kills the witnesses, and after that they arise from the dead, but is Moses dead, or was he assumed into heaven?

### **C. The Two Olive Trees**

The two witnesses are likened to two "olive trees" and two "lamps." This is probably a reference to Zechariah 4. There the two olive trees continually provide oil for the lamps in the temple.

From Zechariah, the two olive trees symbolized the anointed leaders of Israel, Zerubbabel, a prince of the line of David, and

Joshua, the high priest, who helped to rebuild the nation after the Babylonian exile.

## **VII. THE DEATH OF THE TWO WITNESSES**

### **Read: Revelation 11:7-10**

*[7] And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them,*

*[8] and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.*

*[9] For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,*

*[10] and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.*

#### **A. The Beast**

The two witnesses will preach for their allotted time of three and a half years, and then they will be killed by the beast [Antichrist or a forerunner] from the abyss. The ancient Fathers of the Church identify the Beast with Antichrist.

In Revelation the beast stands for the enemy of the Church and of God. The beast that kills them bears a strong resemblance to the fourth beast in Daniel 7.

The witnesses' bodies lie unburied in the great city.

#### **B. The Great City**

There is a lot of debate as to what city is meant by "the great city." Some claim it is Rome, others Jerusalem. The city is allegorically called "Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified."

The city seems to be Jerusalem since Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem.

In Isaiah 1:10 Jerusalem is called Sodom because it has turned its back on the Lord. Sodom and Egypt are infamous in the Bible for their moral depravity and oppressive slavery.

Occasionally the Prophets compared the iniquity of Jerusalem with Sodom and Egypt.

### **C. Dying for Christ**

Because the Two Witnesses were sent by God to call the people of Jerusalem to repentance, reminding them of the consequences of their actions, they were a torment to them and thus hated by them.

The people will rejoice over their death and leave their bodies unburied in the streets of Jerusalem.

## **VIII. ASSUMPTION OF THE WITNESSES**

### **Read: Revelation 11:11-14**

*[11] But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.*

*[12] Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up hither!" And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud.*

*[13] And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

*[14] The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.*

### **A. Overview of Rev 11:11-14**

Those who have given their lives to bear witness to Jesus will also, through the power of the Holy Spirit, share in his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Like Christ who rose from the dead after three days, these witnesses are raised up after "three and a half days."

The prophecy of the Two Witnesses is a call to the Christian to bear witness to Christ in the midst of persecution, even to the point of martyrdom.

God does not abandon those who boldly take His side.

### **B. The Breath of Life**

The breath of life which causes the Two Witnesses to stand up, that is, to be resurrected, reveals the power of the Spirit of God, similar to that described by Ezekiel, in his vision of the dry bones [Ez 37:1-10], which is a symbol of the restoration of Israel.

### **C. Taken up into Heaven**

The Two Witnesses are then taken up into heaven in a cloud. This reminds us of what happened to Elijah and Enoch. If one of the witnesses is Moses rather than Enoch, there is an extra-biblical reference to Moses' assumption in the NT book of Jude. It also reminds us of Jesus' Ascension into heaven.

### **D. A Great Earthquake**

The violent earthquake is the concluding act of the drama introduced by the sixth trumpet, just as an earthquake occurred at the sixth seal [Rev 6:12].

The glorification of the witnesses is in sharp contrast with the punishment meted out to their enemies.

The earthquake indicates that the chastisement is sudden and unexpected. It destroyed a tenth of the city and killed many. The number of those who die represents a great crowd [thousands], embracing all types [seven].

The earthquake is a direct effect of the martyrs' [witnesses] death and glorification, similar to the earthquake that accompanied Jesus' death and resurrection [Mt 27:51; 28:2].

### **E. Many Conversions**

After the death and glorification of the martyrs, there will be a period in which the effects of their witness will be felt by the world. There will be large numbers of conversions among the survivors.

*“and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”*

This is the only chastisement in Revelation that leads some to repentance.

### **F. The Seventh Trumpet**

The seventh trumpet opens a new section which will tell us, first, about the climax of the confrontation between Satan and the powers of evil, and Christ and the Church. It will go on to describe the last battles, with Christ triumphing as Lord of all for ever.